Student: Helen Padgett (6th grade) School: Montevideo Middle School

Principal: Drew Miller

The most inspirational book that I have read is Hidden Figures, Young Readers' Edition, by Margot Lee Shetterly. Four African American women mathematicians became a critical part of NASA in the 1960s. Despite the discrimination they faced, they accomplished their dreams. When I read this book, it made me feel like I could do anything. If these women could accomplish so much with everything against them, then what's stopping me? It made me reflect on how often people thought that girls weren't smart, strong, or capable of taking control of any situation. It changed my perspective of myself. Why should I sit on the side and watch others do what I could do? Just like Dorothy Vaughan, Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Christine Darden, I started to show that girls could do more than just sit and watch. The characters in the book took every opportunity they got. I had to try to do the same. For instance, when my school decided to do sports in the mornings, it happened that the first sport was my favorite, soccer! Several of my friends and I signed up. At first the boys didn't pass us the ball, but we kept our heads held high and made sure when we managed to get the ball we proved we were just as good. In math, I didn't stop at just doing my homework, instead I used the iXL computer math program to do math up to 7th- and 8th-grade levels. Hidden Figures also tells you that everyone is amazing at something. All of the women in the book had talent, yours just might not be as clear. I now look for unexpected talent in others and encourage them to use it. For example, when my friend thought that she couldn't do cross-country running, I encouraged her to do it and she did better than I did. By practicing musical songs with my younger sister and my friend's little brother, I have convinced them to sing with confidence and try choir. If you ever think that you don't have a voice, I recommend that you read this book and let it inspire you to take action. I think you would agree that these women are the strongest people you have ever heard or read about.